



Ms. Marlene Ginsberg  
Vice President: Professional  
Programs  
Legacy International  
1020 Legacy Drive  
Bedford, Virginia 24523  
United States of America

ISDC – International Security and  
Development Center gGmbH  
Friedrichstr. 246, 10969 Berlin  
Germany  
Tel: +49-30-2064 8902  
Cell: +49-151 1117 5462  
Email: [tilman.brueck@isd-center.org](mailto:tilman.brueck@isd-center.org)  
Web: [www.isd-center.org](http://www.isd-center.org)

February 13, 2017

## **Letter of Support**

Dear Marlene,

it is my pleasure to write this letter of support for Legacy International as you discuss scaling up the program “LivingSideBySide”® (LSBS) in Kyrgyzstan with your stakeholders. Below, I summarize our joint work on learning about how LSBS shaped young people’s knowledge, attitudes and behavior in Southern Kyrgyzstan, how we collaborated to achieve this learning and why I see strong value in continuing our collaboration in the future.

For over three decades, LSBS has promoted peace through empowering youth and civil society actors from conflict-affected settings such as the United States, Nigeria, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan and others. Despite the scale of the LSBS program, its impact has not been studied in a rigorous way before.

To address this need, I have led a rigorous, theory-based impact evaluation of LSBS in the South of Kyrgyzstan since 2013. The research has been funded by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie), a non-for-profit research organization based in New Delhi, India. The research team includes colleagues from ISDC - International Security and Development Center in Germany, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in Sweden, United Nations University - Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) in the Netherlands, and the University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan. Our efforts represent a novel and innovative pilot research project to learn more about if and how a peacebuilding education can help promote peace. At the same time, the process of conducting this joint work and the close collaboration it entails between the implementing agencies and the research team are an important learning process for both parties as well.

The LSBS program was implemented in the southern oblasts of Kyrgyzstan in 2014 and 2015. Specifically, the LSBS program was implemented in 10 public Russian-speaking schools in conflict-prone multi-ethnic communities in Osh, Jalalabad and Batken oblasts for adolescents in grades 9-11 by pre-trained teachers-trainers. The participation in the program was voluntary and took place during after-school hours.

During the pilot impact evaluation study that started in 2013 and that was completed by the end of December 2016, the researchers and the implementers from Legacy International (LI) and Centre Interbilim (CIB) worked very closely together, holding numerous meetings in Bishkek and Osh and communicating electronically and by phone and Skype on a regular basis. The impact evaluation of the program was a multi-step activity that was closely tied to the implementation of the program. The research team designed the study in 2013 and launched the research activities in early 2014 and in parallel with the implementation of the program. The evaluation comprised a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the impact of LSBS on fostering inter-ethnic tolerance through changes in knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Detailed survey data was collected before the program was implemented (baseline data), during the program activities and upon their completion (follow-up data). Note that I refer to our research over the period 2013-2016 as a pilot study given the relatively small scale of the program, covering only 10 schools in this phase.

In order to estimate the impact rigorously, the research team compared individual level outcomes of a treatment group (students that took part in the program) to a control group (students in a similar school that did not take part in the program) before, right after the program and one year after the program. The students of the treatment and control groups were broadly similar in characteristics. The quantitative part of the methodology included collecting data from the households and students using surveys and behavioral experiments, whereas the qualitative part included the focus-group discussions with the students and teachers-trainers following the training activities.

Initial results from the study were presented during the annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conferences in Bishkek in October 2015 and October 2016. Detailed findings were presented and discussed during the international research workshop “Impact Evaluations in Fragile States”, which was held in Stockholm in November 2016. This brought together researchers, evaluators and implementers of peacebuilding programs in conflict-affected countries.

While our formal research publication in a journal is not yet completed, the results from our research so far suggest that knowledge and the outcomes related to behavior, such as risk-taking and cooperation, improved as a result of the program. Overall, our evidence to date suggests that there is a positive impact especially for specific sub-groups of the studied population. Given the limited scale of the quantitative study at this stage, the evidence is less conclusive when it comes to the attitudes and beliefs of the participants. However, I will comment on some interesting initial findings in more detail below.

First, we found evidence that the program led to an increase in “out-group” trust (i.e. trust towards people you meet for the first time; people of another ethnicity; and people of another religion). This result appears to be one of the more robust impacts

of the program, both in the short and medium terms (i.e. measured one year after the program).

Second, and very interestingly, participating students report to have made more friends and have a higher proportion of non-co-ethnic friends in their network, suggesting that the program may have had some impact beyond the participated individual.

Third, and as suggested above already, sub-group analyses indicate that girls are affected somewhat differently from boys, with most of the effects being driven by significant impacts on female students. This includes both positive and negative impacts. This may suggest that girls are more receptive to a program like LSBS and are better able to reflect on what tolerance really implies, and how that affects the perception of one's self and of others.

Fourth, students belonging to the country's ethnic majority on average seem to gain somewhat more from the program than those who belong to an ethnic minority. The latter even reported to have significantly lower levels of self-confidence after the program. Medium term impacts show that out-group trust remains higher among participating students than among non-participants, and the incidence of fighting and bullying decreases as a result of the participation. However, the behavioral outcomes measured in the experimental games do not sustain for a year.

Finally, students' beliefs related to "feeling in Kyrgyzstan like at home" seem to have moved in a surprising direction, expressing less support for this claim. Given our data limitations, we could not determine the cause of this shift in the data or how future programming could obtain a different outcome. Such analysis, and advice for practice, would require a larger, more detailed study. However, our results suggest that program participation makes students on average more likely to respond negatively to this question. Yet, when looking at the sub-samples, we observe that this effect is driven by the sub-sample of boys. We hypothesize that maybe the program made boys more (negatively) aware of other groups being present at school and in society and that this awareness decreased their sense of 'feeling at home in Kyrgyzstan.' This is an issue that would merit further inspection in future programming and studying, helping students to accept awareness of diversity as a strength.

These initial quantitative results contrast somewhat with relatively stronger findings from the qualitative part of the study, in which students reported to have really benefitted from the program in various ways, such as gaining more conflict-resolution skills, learning to accept different views and opinions, and helping improve the students' relations with family members or friends as well as improve academically. Perhaps students indeed did feel the program was useful and they really enjoyed participating in it, especially when asked immediately afterwards. But such positive feelings and bonding may not be enough to change possibly deep-rooted beliefs about one-self and others.

In terms of policy implications, the findings of our pilot research project emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding at the individual level. It is likely that only some of the attitudes and behavior can be shaped by a short-term, school-based intervention lasting six to eight weeks. Based on our research, we hypothesize that "being" peaceful and "acting" in a peaceful manner is actually a very large-scale and comprehensive behavioral shift for some people, which is unlikely to respond to smaller, shorter and singular interventions. In

situations where violent conflict may flare up again, larger, longer and more embedded approaches to peacebuilding will be required, addressing drivers of peace at school, at home, in the media, in politics, in civil society and beyond, and doing so consistently over many years.

Clearly, no single intervention can achieve all of these aims in one measure. However, scaling up LSBS to a nation-wide program offers a unique opportunity in several ways:

First, it would permit the methodology of LSBS to be updated in line with the findings emerging from this pilot research program. For example, more attention could be paid to the role of women and various ethnic groups (majority versus minority), which the research team has identified as key issues.

Second, a much larger program would allow for learning about slight variations in the program implementation to constantly improve its effectiveness. Either by design or by practice over years, a nationwide program would adapt over time, offering the opportunity to learn about how best to deliver the scaled-up curriculum.

Third, a nationwide program embedded in all schools would likely strengthen the impact of the program as the spillovers from LSBS would be experienced by significantly more people, mirroring their own experiences. Once several siblings in one family had participated in the program, for example, it is possible that knowledge, attitudes and behavior by non-participant individuals may also be changed (for example among the parents).

Fourth, a nation-wide program would have much more scope for conducting more powerful statistical tests, permitting the identification of impacts which simply had to remain below the surface of the relatively small-scale pilot study.

The research team and I would be delighted to advise Legacy International and its partners on how to integrate a research and learning component into the new program. To the best of our knowledge, it would be a unique effort, and possibly a global first, to conduct a rigorous impact evaluation of a nation-wide peacebuilding program for young people, such as LSBS in Kyrgyzstan. We see much value for Legacy International, for Kyrgyzstan and for the global community of scholars and practitioners in conducting such an effort.

Finally, I would like to say what pleasure it has been to work with you and your dedicated and professional team, both at Legacy International in Bedford, Virginia, and at Centre Interbilim in Bishkek, over the years. We wish you well with your good work!

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Tilman Brück  
Director  
ISDC